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MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Cape Cod Public Hearing

REPORT

On Wednesday, May 9, 2001,
the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
held a public hearing at Cape Cod Community College in Barnstable, MA.
It was the sixth public hearing
in an ongoing series of hearings throughout the Commonwealth.

The purpose of the hearing was to listen
to the concerns of women, girls, and organizations on the Cape and
to identify the most critical issues facing them.

The Commission hopes that the
comments, feedback, and input of all of the participants will help us
focus on some of the most pressing concerns facing women and girls in our state.

Attendees

Commissioners

Roseanna Means, Vice-Chair
Minosca Alcántara
Marianne Fleckner

Staff

Priscilla Golding
Melixza Gonzalez
Frances Jarvis
Cecilia Blaine
Vicky Hush

Participants from the Community

Donna Aceto, Independence House
Lois Andre, Cape Cod Community College
Joan Balfe
Cheryl Bartlett, Community Action Committee of Cape Cod and Islands, Inc.
Leona Bombaci, Department of Social Services
Tess Browne, Mass Action for Women Audit
Valerie Pereira Brown, Health Care of Southeastern MA
Barbara Buchanan, Center for Health Education, Falmouth Hospital
Mary Kay Carroll, Cape Cod Community College
Judy Desrochers, Bourne Public Schools
Liz DiCarlo, Lighthouse Health Access Alliance
M.B. "Peg" Dietzgen, Mass NARAL
Kathie Farrington
Taylore Farrington
Lynne Forrest, Independence House
Lauren Fox
Anne Foxx, Mashpee Wampanoag and Mass Action for Women Audit
Sally Fritz, Falmouth Housing Authority
Judy Gaseidnes, Circles for Change
Sandra Gifford, VNA Child Care Center
Carol Groh, Independence House

Participants from the Community, continued

Lee Hamilton, Cape Cod Community College
Helen Helfer, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Dianne Holcomb, Cape Cod Neighborhood Support Coalition
Carol Howes, Health Care of Southeastern MA
Martha E. Johnson, Sandwich COA
Mary E. Johnson, Independence House
Rosemari Kapp
Wendy Kapp, Safe Harbor CACCI
Eileen Kearns, Cape Cod Community College
Christina Kemprecos, Cape Cod Women's Organization
Donalee Lacasse, Sandwich Youth Task Force
Louise Luckenbill
Gina Lyman
Paula Mealy, Access Family Literacy
Mary Morrison
Bobbi Nichols
Robin Paris, Cape Cod Photo Art
Avis Parke, People MEET, Inc.
Louise Patrick, Mashpee Human Services
Liz Rabideau, *Cape Cod Parent and Child*
Brigid Reilly, Community Action Committee Child Care Network
Kenni Rose, Independence House
Christina Russell, Dare Family Services
Margaret Sabens, Safe Zone
Kathy Schatzberg, Cape Cod Community College
Patti Smith, Cape Cod Women's Organizations Publications of New England
Barbara Stafford, People MEET, Inc.
Cathy Staples, Cape Cod Women's Organizations
June Stevens, Women's Empowerment through Cape Area Networking, Inc.
Brenda Swain, Young Child First! Community Partnership Program
Lisa Switzer, Dare Family Services
Anne Toran, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
Katherine Vacca
Sue Walker
Helen Warren, League of Women Voters – Falmouth
Janice Walford, *The Enterprise*
Linda Willoughby, Women's Empowerment through Cape Area Networking, Inc.
Kathleen Wright

Opening Remarks

Welcome and Introduction by Commissioner Roseanna Means, Vice-Chair
Commissioner Means welcomed all the participants and introduced the Commissioners present. She discussed the history of the Commission and the procedures for the hearing as well as what would happen to the information compiled. She then opened the floor for testimony.

Summary of Testimony

Summaries based on: note-takers at the meeting, staff listening to the audiocassette recording of the testimony, and written testimony.

Leona Bombaci
Department of Social Services
Ms. Bombaci is a social worker and a single mother of a 12-year-old girl. She testified on several issues affecting Cape Cod residents. While most people view the Cape as a seasonal vacation community, Ms. Bombaci stated that property values on the Cape have risen to almost four times the original cost over the last 20 years. Despite the high property values, incomes remain modest. She further noted that the Cape has a growing population of elders and young families that has resulted in a need for more educational, child care, health care, and recreational services. She has also witnessed an increase in the number of children and families who are affected by domestic violence, neglect, and physical or substance abuse. Ms. Bombaci testified that early child care programs are facing serious challenges in meeting the needs of the numerous children who benefit from another caretaker in their lives. She encouraged people to support the Quality Aid Bill, H.2129 *An Act to Promote Out-Of-School Time Programming and Community Education for Children and Families in the Commonwealth,* which will provide support for well-trained and well-paid caregivers. Another concern to Ms. Bombaci is the Massachusetts Military Reserve. She believes that it is a toxic area that has created health problems for five Upper Cape towns. She testified that for over 50 years, citizens have been exposed to contaminated water and air. Ms. Bombaci believes that women need to learn the skills necessary to be more political. A lot of the issues raised at the hearing have legislative bills and budget lines. She stated that, "we are wrapped up in being nurturers to our kids and our homes that we often don't have the time to do it."

She feels prevention programs are not getting enough attention. She further stated that there is institutional abuse in state agencies that has to be confronted.
Written testimony on file.

Helen Helfer
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Ms. Helfer is from Cotuit. She raised the issue of pay equity. She believes that pay equity gets less attention because women have become accustomed to earning less than men. She testified that she speaks of inequity not just in terms of women but also men of color and women of all ethnicities who are earning less. She stated that Maine and other states are doing some exciting work; that other states are looking at this more aggressively in terms of comparable pay and work. She stated that we must continue to work and fight for equal pay. Ms. Helfer concluded by saying, "unless we do that, power in this country is going to remain in the hands of white men. Institutionally I think that is a tragedy. Many voices of women are not heard because of that."

Kathie Farrington
Hyannis
Ms. Farrington is a grandparent and activist. She has been battling with the Department of Social Services over custody issues for some time. She testified that her daughter was a victim of a severely violent relationship and had to dodge a stalker when they moved to the Cape from the Midwest. Ms. Farrington was assisting her daughter in raising her granddaughter when she had to leave the state for two months. When she returned, her daughter, who was living in a hotel, lost custody of her granddaughter. Ms. Farrington was told by DSS that because she was a disabled veteran, she could not be considered a legal guardian. She testified that she believes that the Department of Social Services has gone awry. She stated that she has contacted 14 families who told her they were also "abused" by the agency. She would like an assessment of the agency to be done, an audit that would follow the money trail. She questioned the agency's commitment to families by asking, "How can we get the focus back on family preservation rather than what is in the best interest of the child when they do not have the training to determine what is in the best interest of the child?" Ms. Farrington also testified on the issue of education. She feels that the Cape is lacking resources for children who are ahead of their peers. She said that, "there is no place for gifted children and no move toward bringing them into the classrooms at a higher level."

Taylore Farrington
Hyannis
Miss Farrington is the granddaughter of Kathie Farrington. She stated that she knew the alphabet by age three and that she knows more than the other children in her class.

Lauren Fox
Hatchville
Ms. Fox is a strong proponent of women's health care and complementary medicine. She is concerned that there is a serious deficiency for the choices for Cape women in obstetrical care. She noted that the only physician and midwifery service in the Upper Cape area closed, leaving two certified nurse midwives presently on the Cape, one at Falmouth Hospital and one at Cape Cod Hospital. Both of them work independently and only provide services when they rotate call with their own physician back-up. The practice that recently closed provided the only choice for women to have a relaxed intervention birth due to the practitioner's philosophy of birthing as a non-medical, non-emergent event. This practice also provided respectful back-up for the women of the Cape who chose to have a home birth. This support is now eradicated, leaving women who chose this option for birthing without non-judgmental back-up and having to rely on the emergency room for intervention. Ms. Fox said that intervention would be quite hostile. She testified that we should find ways to preserve what many of us fought for so long: choice.
Written testimony on file.

M.B. "Peg" Dietzgen
Mass NARAL
Ms. Dietzgen discussed the contraceptives and hormone therapy bill. She stated that, "Within the health insurance industry, women don't receive the proper insurance to cover contraception and hormone replacement therapy." She believes that the failure to cover contraception and hormone replacement therapy is an act of gender inequality. She noted that Viagra was covered almost immediately when it came out on the market. She also stated that Massachusetts ranks 36th in the country in the provision of contraceptives to women in need. Ms. Dietzgen noted that women on average pay 68% more in out-of-pocket health care expenses than men, which translates into costs of $7,000 to $10,000 over a women's reproductive lifetime. She quoted a statistic indicating that 75% of Americans surveyed stated they favored private health insurance companies covering the cost of contraceptives and would be willing to pay slightly more in monthly premiums to do this. Women on average are in need of contraception

for three-quarters of their reproductive lifetime. Each year 3.6 million pregnancies, nearly 60% of all pregnancies, are unintended, ending in abortion. She stated that, "if we could have our contraceptives covered properly, there would be many less unintended pregnancies." She urged the Commission to support S.805/H.2193 *An Act Providing Equitable Coverage of Services Under Health Plans.*

Helen Warren
League of Women Voters - Falmouth
Ms. Warren testified that the League of Women Voters believes that all U.S. residents should have access to a basic level of health care. That includes, among other benefits, the prevention of disease and the promotion of reproductive health. Hormone replacement prevents disease, such as osteoporosis and heart disease. Birth control promotes reproductive health, in that it allows a woman to choose when and how many children to have. She believes that not all choice should be about abortion. The League also believes in gender equity. She said that, "if insurance coverage includes Viagra for men, it should also cover contraceptives and hormone replacement therapy for women."

Christina Kemprecos
Cape Cod Women's Organization
Ms. Kemprecos stated that every day she reads of nurses' shortages and daycare provider shortages. These typically are women-oriented, low-paying jobs. Ms. Kemprecos feels that if women were treated equally in the workplace and paid equally, a lot of these issues would perhaps disappear or at least improve.

Joan Balfe
East Falmouth
Ms. Balfe testified that she went to Washington D.C. last Mother's Day to walk with mothers against gun violence in the Million Mom March. She testified that, "most of the states are having a mother's march and we're having one in Boston on Mother's Day at the Boston Common." She stated, "Lawmakers locally and in Washington, D.C., need to understand that we all need sensible gun laws." Ms. Balfe encouraged hearing participants to contact senators and noted that, "there are so many laws coming up that there's a very strong component out there that would like to see them smashed down. If we don't make a real strong voice then they will be smashed down. The Mother's March in Washington was an overwhelming success. Hopefully this one will be too."

Brigid Reilly

Community Action Committee of Cape Cod and Islands, Inc.

Ms. Reilly testified that the Community Action Committee has worked with the poor, disenfranchised population across the Cape for 35 years. She feels that women's issues are not simple; they are not single and not separate. She testified about child care. She sited a study, which indicated that one of the top five issues in Massachusetts is juvenile delinquency. Ms. Reilly further noted that there is a high rate of juvenile delinquency in this state between the hours of 2 and 6 p.m. (based on statistics taken from a 33-year study on children who were in early educational programs.) Ms. Reilly stated that, "we're in a crisis that affects women because we're talking about children." She talked about women who are going to work who cannot afford child care, because on the Cape child care can cost anywhere from $5,000-$15,000 a year. She further testified that child care providers on the Cape are committed, invested, and dedicated. They are also undervalued and underpaid. She asked the Commission to look at the social effects of child care because quality child care affects the children, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), and housing. Ms. Reilly noted that in Cuba, "you may not be able to afford refrigeration in a daycare center but not one person is allowed to work with children unless they have higher education and secondary education. That's how much they value their children." She testified that there should be a big investment in child care centers and what they provide. Ms. Reilly said, "as a parent, you may want the best quality in the world, but we know that relationship consistency is valid and very important. For most families on the Cape, their number one issue is access to child care." She further stated that, "child care providers and children are undervalued and underpaid and that we need to look socially at the importance of the very hard job that they do."

Cheryl Bartlett

Community Action Committee of Cape Cod and Islands, Inc.

Ms. Bartlett is the Executive Director at the Community Action Committee of Cape Cod and Islands, Inc. She stated that the mission of the Community Action Committee is to engage in social action, to help remove barriers to self-sufficiency. The CAC's on the Cape and Islands have identified housing, child care and transportation as three major barriers to self-sufficiency. Also, the Massachusetts Community Action Program directors compiled a report summarizing poverty in Massachusetts. A single female heads the majority of families living in poverty. She feels that girls' issues are the most important at this time. Previously, Ms. Bartlett worked in a mentorship program for young women in middle school and high school and found that there are still a lot of issues for young women around developing confidence; issues around choices and

sexuality. She stated that bad decision-making as young women keep them in situations that create barriers for creating self-sufficiency. She further testified that making resources available to young women and girls in helping develop healthy decision-making skills would help them become healthy, self-sufficient adults.

Dianne Holcomb

Cape Cod Neighborhood Support Coalition

Ms. Holcomb is the Coordinator of the Cape Cod Neighborhood Support Coalition. The coalition is one of 20 community coalitions across the state. She testified that they work to prevent child abuse and neglect through strengthening families and building communities. She testified that her job is to coordinate existing resources, ensure that services meet the needs of the people, and bring out the voices of residents in planning for local resources. Ms. Holcomb believes that the prevention of child abuse and neglect must include funding and support for a primary prevention effort such as HY/HC (Healthy Youth/Healthy Community). Such an effort provides a broad-based means to include all sectors of the community in sharing responsibility for youth and their future. Prevention efforts offer the best opportunity to stop abuse and neglect before they occur. The fiscal and social costs of ignoring child abuse and neglect is staggering. Ms. Holcomb referred to a report by the Massachusetts Citizens for Children, "A State Call to Action: Working to End Child Abuse and Neglect." It ends with a quote from President John F. Kennedy, "We can say with some assurance, that, although children may be the victims of fate, they will not be the victims of our neglect." Ms. Holcomb testified that, "it is our charge to have these words be our truth." She further stated that her organization was funded by a grant by the Massachusetts Violence Prevention Team to provide workplace violence prevention in towns. She reiterated that, "there is a huge undercurrent of violence; it's really hard to separate workplace violence, community violence, and domestic violence." One of the resources used in her town is a civilian domestic violence officer. She is a liaison that works in partnership with the police and Independence House. Ms. Holcomb stated that having her as an advocate in the community has reduced tension among workers. *Written testimony on file.*

Robin Paris

Cape Cod Photo Art

Ms. Paris is an artist and has lived on the Cape for six years. She has had extensive amount of experience, not professionally, but personally with the Department of Social Services system. She has also been a Big Sister for 18 years. Ms. Paris testified that, "one

of the travesties of the DSS system is that a huge amount of money is spent in reactionary mode, fire drill mode, chasing down major issues and catastrophes that happen in individual households because a lot of them are in warehousing mode." She believes that money should be spent on children. Children are the reason why DSS exists. Ms. Paris said that, "children need constructive, healthy role models, whether it is in the DSS system or any other system." She asked us to consider the following: "There are more women in the world than there are men, why are all these things happening? Why are women not getting paid what men are getting paid? We are the caretakers. Why is it that women aren't paid as much but yet they are the major caretakers when 50% of the marriages fall apart, not getting support from men?" Ms. Paris is not a mother but considers herself a charitable woman and an entrepreneur. She noted that she pays 30-35% of her income for health care to have access to a doctor and attend to her health.

Liz DiCarlo

Lighthouse Health Access Alliance

Ms. DiCarlo has worked for over 30 years on several of the issues listed on the Commission's Cape Cod Public Hearing survey. She testified on the issue of Health NOW. Ms. DiCarlo feels that the most critical thing that we have to look at is in all of the incremental approaches to ensuring that people have access to health care. She is not against incremental approaches but stated that the "issue of every resident in Massachusetts having access to health care without any qualifications is the way it should be." Ms. DiCarlo believes that "incremental approaches to health care are really spending a lot of energy when in fact, what we need, is an absolutely strong stance from organizations such as the Commission on Women in support of the single payer system." Ms. DiCarlo further testified that another issue is access to health care for people whose primary language is not English. She noted that while major steps have been made in terms of ensuring that medical interpreters are available in emergency rooms and psychiatric rooms, there is room for improvement. Ms. DiCarlo strongly feels that enough money must be in place for medical interpreters to be available in a paid capacity rather than as a volunteer. She recommended that there be some kind of reimbursement mechanism put in place that medical interpreters are compensated for the services they provide.

Brenda Swain

Community Partnership Program

Ms. Swain coordinates a Community Partnership Program on the Cape. She feels that it is important that parents are comfortable with the care that they have for their children and that child care providers are paid and compensated well enough so that they can get the education they need to do a good job. Another issue relevant to her is the high rate of breast cancer on Cape Cod. She feels that there needs to be some research done as to why that is occurring and strongly stresses the need for looking for answers in her community.

Margaret Sabens

Safe Zone

Ms. Sabens is the founder of the business model called Safe Zone. It addresses violence in the workplace and in the home. Safe Zone was adopted by Falmouth Hospital in 1996 and will be accepted by the Cape Cod Hospital in November 2001. Safe Zone is a model that businesses can follow to institute policies that correct discrimination in the workplace. It provides education regarding workplace and domestic violence. It also provides intervention methods for victims and perpetrators of violence. Safe Zone targets employees who exhibit dysfunctional behavior in the workplace. It sets a standard of zero-tolerance for violent and abusive behavior at work. The zero-tolerance approach offers individual counseling as an employee benefit. If an employee chooses not to partake s/he is dismissed from the workplace. The Safe Zone model demonstrates to the community and government agencies that business is proactive in promoting a peaceful, supportive, fair, and respectful workplace environment. There is no guarantee that violence will not happen; however, the company and its employees are less vulnerable with the Safe Zone in place.

Ms. Sabens also relayed a story of a woman who was being threatened by her then-husband, who is a police officer. He pointed his gun to her head and it was the intervention of her 10-year-old daughter, who called 911 that stopped the incident. This man has never had to give up his gun. No one can prove he threatened to kill the woman; the 911 tape disappeared. Nothing can be done until this man's gun is taken from him. She stated that he continues to threaten his now ex-wife.

Written testimony on file.

Anne Toran

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

Ms. Toran is the mother of six daughters, grandmother of nine grandchildren. She became a gay rights activist because her youngest daughter is a lesbian. She educated herself because she thought her daughter's life would be harder than her other daughters but it was not. She stated that it has been a marvelous journey for her family. She educated herself so that she could support and validate her daughter. She worked as a school secretary for 27 years. That is where she became involved in the Massachusetts Department of Education Safe Schools. She testified that this program was funded with over a million dollars with the express purpose of Gay/Straight Alliances in schools. GSA's are clubs for diversity that are open for gays and straights. "It's for people who are allies," she said. The state of Massachusetts has over 180 GSA's in its schools. Ms. Toran noted that they go into the schools as representatives of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians) and Safe Schools to educate and enlighten. The Safe Schools funding was cut when a parents group made a video of one of the workshops they did at Tufts University last year. The workshop was very specific and answered kids' questions. The parents group, being offended, made a video and brought it to the Department of Education. Thus, funding was cut.

Cecilia Blaine

Boston

Ms. Blaine testified that she is one of many people dealing with housing issues. She has been on a waiting list since 1994 and as far as she knows, is still on that list. She stated that, "if you do not fall under priority, regardless of being on the waiting list, you are constantly being pushed back." She feels that something needs to be done for those who are constantly put on waiting lists, even when they are considered a priority. Ms. Blaine testified that the housing authorities are not considering those who have waited for so long. She further noted that the organizations are not taking into consideration the cost of placing some children in shelters. She noted that, "this is a statewide problem and is causing overcrowding in shelters."

Lisa Switzer

Dare Family Services

Dare Family Services is a specialized non-profit foster care agency covering Southeastern Massachusetts. Ms. Switzer works primarily on the Cape as a specialized foster parent, who has worked with teen girls for over seven years. They have been taken out of situations that involved sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, drug, and

alcohol involvement within their families. These are young girls who, most likely, will never be able to return home. Ms. Switzer works with many teenage girls who have aged out of the foster care system. She stated that over 2,700 young adults came into emergency shelter in the year 2000, a 37% increase over the year before. Many of these teenagers include those who have aged out of the custody of the State Department of Social Services. Ms. Switzer's concern is for young women and girls because "their problems address all of the issues that are being discussed at this hearing: homelessness, violence against women, child care, no health benefits, and no support for these young girls." She stated that, "unfortunately, they are on their own at 18 and they are on our streets." She has looked for resources for these girls and has been finding the search rather limited. Ms. Switzer proposes that the state look at some kind of aftercare program. She also feels that foster parents of this state need more support than what they are getting. Ms. Switzer noted that, "many girls, having loss and attachment issues, purposely sabotage their placement and go from home to home until they are 18." She said, "I challenge any one of you to find a place for an 18-year-old girl who does not have a child or drug or alcohol problems, and does not have a family to fall back on." Many shelters serve homeless young men and single mothers with children, but this population has fewer resources.

Judy Gaseidnes
Circles for Change

Ms. Gaseidnes has lived on the Cape since 1992. She represents the program Circles for Change, an empowerment program for girls 7-18 years old. The program was initially intended for the ages of 11-14. It was developed as a result of research indicating that girls' self-esteem starts to decline between the ages of 11-14. Circles for Change uses the expressive arts to give girls an alternative way of expressing themselves because speaking is not the only mode of expression. Ms. Gaseidnes testified that the program gives girls coping skills, an opportunity to connect with other girls, and a chance to be with girls who are different than they are. Circles for Change assists in helping these girls make positive decisions while boosting their self-esteem. It started on the Upper Cape and has grown to the Mid-Cape as well. Ms. Gaseidnes stated that there are currently seven Circles going on in those areas. They started with private funding and when that ran out they turned to the state. They get referrals from state agencies. In 2000, Circles for Change received $150,000 in state funding, which was also supplemented with grants and donations. She noted that programs like Circles for Change assisted and supported girls and that, "girls have to know that we're there for them and that growing up can be wonderful when you have community support."

Christina Russell
Dare Family Services
Ms. Russell is concerned about the difficulties facing young women in foster care turning 18. There is no place for these young women to go. She noted that there are not enough beds for them, especially the girls. She testified that not many people want an unwed, pregnant 15-year-old girl in their house because she may have a tremendous amount of emotional baggage. The need for space and shelter for young women and girls is huge.

Anne Foxx
Mashpee Wampanoag Community and Mass Action Audit for Women
Ms. Foxx testified about the Wampanoag Community on Cape Cod. She noted that her community is trying to develop allies with other agencies in the community through the tribal council. They are currently running programs, such as domestic violence prevention, job training, and education. Ms. Foxx's concern is that her community will be forgotten. Noting that the indigenous population on Cape Cod has gone through a tremendous amount of turmoil in the past, she feels that people need to be very culturally aware, very sensitive to it, specifically in the schools. Ms. Foxx noted that the face of Cape Cod is changing all the time. These issues should be of utmost importance. She feels that if people in her community knew they were included in some of the agencies here on Cape Cod, there would be more of a unified voice and it would "strengthen all of us if we [could] work together and build a better community."

Louise Luckenbill
Falmouth
Ms. Luckenbill stated that she got "fired up" when she heard about the Safe Zone because she believes that violence is endemic in our entire society. She hopes that the legislators will listen to this and read the report and that women can be leaders in changing this disease that has spread through our entire society.

Liz Rabideau
Cape Cod Parent and Child
Ms. Rabideau moved to the Cape and started her own publishing company. She started the publication *Cape Cod Parent and Child*. She testified that, "while it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a village to make a parent." She discovered that parents were looking for resources before their kids got into trouble. She testified that, "the people

who are affected by these issues the most, particularly child care, don't have the time to go out and fight for it; parents who are desperate to find child care, keep their kids healthy, keep their lives together and keep their jobs do not have time to come to hearings and testify." She feels that someone, perhaps an individual with no kids but who understands the child care issue will step up and say, "I'll be your voice." She explained that one of the cornerstones of her quarterly publication is a parent roundtable. Parents and other representatives from other organizations sit down and discuss issues. They convened a roundtable discussion on technologies in schools, child care, and television's effect on children. Ms. Rabideau concluded by stating that, "the period of time that someone is passionate about the issue of child care is shorter than the period of time it takes to change any legislation. Parents are so focused on getting their children child care that they patchwork it, finding a grandmother, a friend to help out."

Kenni Rose
Independence House
Ms. Rose is a client of Independence House. She testified about how she could not go to work for 18 months because her son was on a day care waiting list for that time. She stated that she could not afford a $165.00 a week day care fee. The other issue she addressed is that even after women leave a batterer, the court system forces children for visitation with the batterer. She testified that, "It is not only physical, it's emotional. It leaves the kids in the same battleground on a continuous basis. Sometimes it's only a few hours on a weekend, mostly it's three or four days a week. The results are devastating for the kids." She further stated that, "when they are 13 or 14 years old, we cannot undo the bad stuff and then we have kids with problems. The emotional scars are just as bad as the physical ones." Ms. Rose said, "batterers, because they cannot manipulate the women anymore, manipulate the children to get to their mothers." She mentioned that batterers understand that the children mean more to victims than anything else and so they try to disrupt the relationship between mother and children. Ms. Rose firmly believes that the courts have got to start ruling on it. "The judges place the children right in the hands of the batterers and it is not in a neutral setting or in a setting where the mother is present," she said.

Donna Aceto
Independence House
Ms. Aceto is a client at Independence House and she believes that the courts need to be educated on domestic violence and to then honor that knowledge once they have it. In

testifying, she told her own story. Her husband had a 51A report filed on him by the Department of Social Services. Ms. Aceto stated that, "When I went for my hearing I had three counselors with me, an 18-page report from DSS with me, and I had a lawyer. The judge took custody away from me, giving me three days with my children and giving the batterer four days a week." She found that this was happening all over the Cape, all over the state. She feels that the children are the true victims and it is time that it changes. She said, "What's going on in the courts is wrong. There is a huge gender bias and a huge financial bias and a poor woman doesn't stand a chance against a wealthy man."

Linda Willoughby

Women's Empowerment through Cape Area Networking, Inc.

Ms. Willoughby represented a group of ten women who started a women's center on the Cape with roots at the community college. It evolved into WE CAN, Inc. Ms. Willoughby testified that the program supplies information, mentoring, advocacy, and support to women of all ages and economic classes on Cape Cod, who are seeking solutions to problems and seeking to further their educational and career growth. Their staff directs women to organizations that may help them with problems. They offer mentors for women, answer questions, help women locate services, respond if a resource does not pan out, and share the wisdom derived from their experiences. They are a non-profit clearinghouse organization. They would like to support women who go through transitions of divorce, career change, re-entry, and retirement. They hope to be up and running in June.

Carol Groh

Independence House

Ms. Groh is a client at Independence House. She testified that her experience with the courts, police, and her batterer was a difficult process. She explained that through the court process, her ex-husband was granted supervised visits at the visitation center at New Hope but he has not pursued that. She stated that some key aspects of the system needed overhauling because, "the court system is based on laws from way back when." She believes that the only thing that matters to the courts is physical abuse, that emotional abuse does not matter. In Ms. Groh's opinion, the important thing for children is their emotional welfare. She hopes that there will be changes in the court system so that the dysfunctional parent could somehow be monitored or have visitation taken away. She stated that, "the whole meaning of leaving the batterer is to protect the children but you can't if you are putting them back into that situation."

Lynn Forrest

Independence House

Ms. Forrest testified that judges and courts need education around abuse and domestic violence. Some of this education is starting to happen. She explained two of the things that Independence House is trying to accomplish: "collaborating with the legal staff at the courts and meeting with the police at their office." She said that, "they are trying to stem the cycle of violence starting with kids as young as they can, having children's groups and keeping them safe. If mom has to go to court we take care of them. We have older children's empowerment groups to help these kids express themselves and speak out and raise their self-esteem." She feels that legislators should acknowledge the children who witness violence. Not all violence is aimed at them but they witness it.

Avis Park

People MEET, Inc.

Ms. Park is the founder and president of People Meet, Inc. Her organization helps low income people have entertainment and connections after hours. People MEET started, because there was so much loneliness and alcoholism on the Cape in 1977, when the group began. She testified that she is concerned about the lack of advocacy for elders in most communities, particularly, for older women. Ms. Park cares for her two elderly parents. She would like Massachusetts to follow other states' lead and provide money for family or friends who are caring for elders in their own homes. She talked about taking in people who have no place else to go. She is also concerned about older lesbians on the Cape, making sure they get the health care appropriate for their needs. Ms. Park stated that she does not want the older lesbian community to be forgotten or to be afraid on their jobs. She would like the Commission to recognize discrimination not only based on race but also on sexual preference.

Lee Hamilton

Cape Cod Community College

Ms. Hamilton is a former welfare recipient who went on to get a Ph.D. and is still under-employed. She testified that she wrote her dissertation on families at risk for homelessness on Cape Cod. The study was conducted for three agencies on the Cape. Ms. Hamilton would like to do a subsidized study in the fall of all people who live in motels off-season. When she attempted to do a count of homeless families on the Cape in April, she discovered that people are living in motels. A number of them have been pushed out because of the season. She concluded by saying that, "the lack of affordable and even accessible housing is the issue and people coming out of shelters have to go

off Cape." Ms. Hamilton expressed concern about how this affects the diversity on the Cape.

Additional Written Testimony

Kathleen Wright
Brewster
Ms. Wright submitted written testimony stating her main concern as a woman living on Cape Cod is "the degradation of our environment." She sees "over-development, destruction of green space, dumping of toxins, and the military use of microwaves" implicated in the cause of cancer on Cape Cod. She wrote that they have also been implicated in the cause of severe anxiety. Ms. Wright concluded by writing, "Globally, we see the degradation of the Earth; Cape Cod will be particularly vulnerable to climate changes."
Written testimony on file.

Sue Walker
Sandwich
Ms. Walker thanked the Commission for coming to Cape Cod. She submitted written testimony agreeing "that domestic violence, child care and health care are important issues." Ms. Walker is most concerned about affordable housing and subsidized housing for families. She wrote that family support needs more money. "The Mass Family Network Program is low cost and very helpful," she wrote. The Mass Family Network Program helps reduce stress, child abuse, and domestic violence. The Program also helps maximize a young child's emotional and intellectual development. Additionally, she stated that groundwater and wildlife should be protected.
Written testimony on file.

Women's Empowerment through Cape Area Networking, Inc.
Written testimony was submitted on behalf of WE CAN, Inc. suggesting that "there are a number of areas in which there is a need for policy changes in order to address issues of inequality in the status of women." These areas are: welfare reform, economic development and educational opportunity, violence against women, and legal services. Written testimony included policy recommendations for these four areas.
Written testimony on file.

Issue Boards

Participants were invited to write anonymous comments on post-it notes and put them on the appropriate Issue Board during the hearing.

Girls' Issues

- ☆ Mentoring programs
- ☆ Give girls role models and decision-making skills to prevent unplanned pregnancy
- ☆ Equal treatment in schools from teachers
- ☆ We need to focus more on outreach programs for our teens with issues that are worldwide
- ☆ More diversity in education in schools
- ☆ More money for services to support young girls on their own; nothing presently available until they get pregnant
- ☆ Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth
- ☆ Education for schools on domestic violence/ sexual harassment
- ☆ The MCAS limits other experiences for students
- ☆ Better checking for foster care homes
- ☆ More money for foster parents and independent living
- ☆ Need proper sex education, safety in health classes in schools
- ☆ Teens aging out of state custody need:
    1. Skills development
    2. Prevention services
- ☆ Support/mentoring/self-esteem programs for girls

Violence Against Women

- ☆ Child abuse prevention programs
- ☆ Gun law reforms to end gun violence
- ☆ Violence against girls should be addressed with their boyfriends
- ☆ Training on violence against women for culturally diverse, non-English speaking women
- ☆ Support domestic violence training programs
- ☆ Women should not have to uproot and hide out because of abuse – make abuser leave

- ☆ Zero-tolerance for violence
- ☆ Provide more crisis shelters that teach women new lives
- ☆ Safe places and safe zones needed
- ☆ Teach children that violence doesn't work
- ☆ Conflict resolution and mediation
- ☆ Support workplace violence initiatives
- ☆ There will be no change in the systemic violence in this state and nation until something is done about violence in the media, violence against women and children
- ☆ Provide subsidies for victims of domestic violence
- ☆ Funds for the Cape Cod Women's Center cut this year
- ☆ Better in-school counseling for women in abusive relationships

Health Care

- ☆ Provide health care for single mothers without insurance. Special advocacy for older women who do not qualify for Medicare
- ☆ Support women's health issues as well as men
- ☆ Single payer system returns
- ☆ Health NOW, Universal health care access and choice
- ☆ More health care on Cape Cod
- ☆ Equal insurance coverage for contraception, general health care and reproductive disease prevention
- ☆ Outreach and education in cultural linguistic minority communities
- ☆ Funding for medical interpreters
- ☆ Mental health/substance abuse parity
- ☆ Bring midwifery back to the Cape
- ☆ Free or low cost dental care is practically non-existent on the Cape
- ☆ Why are cancer rates so high on the Cape? A ten-year-old question still unanswered
- ☆ No more Viagra, pass the contraception and hormone replacement bill now

Economic Development and Stability

- ☆ Equal pay, equal opportunity
- ☆ Pay equality for women
- ☆ Women in low paying jobs cannot afford basic cost of living
- ☆ Women hold most underpaid jobs
- ☆ Need more women in politics
- ☆ Workplace equality

- ☆ Housing should take over the Massachusetts Military Base; where we can develop community housing
- ☆ Women don't have the same economic opportunity as men
- ☆ Let education hours count to women on welfare
- ☆ People on welfare stay in college until they can earn a living wage for themselves and family
- ☆ Women need economic job training opportunities, our lives will not improve until this happens
- ☆ Transitional employment services should include career development and not just entry employment for the short term

Other

- ☆ Give payment to family members who give up employment to take care of aging parents in their own homes
- ☆ Bring to non-connected women the ability to influence our legislators
- ☆ Support for low income housing
- ☆ Include the Wampanoag tribe in all state services on the Cape
- ☆ Concern for the Massachusetts Military Base, the toxic waste there
- ☆ Support programs for immigrant populations on the Cape
- ☆ Fix housing problem to enable the working poor to live on Cape Cod
- ☆ Show support for one-gun-a-month law
- ☆ An invisible community on the Cape, older lesbians, needs human and legal rights. Lesbians need protection from violence and discrimination too
- ☆ Quality medical care for women well over 70 years old. HMO's are sapping premiums from older single women
- ☆ Need to create housing that also considers environmental conservation concerns
- ☆ More flexibility in policies in regulation, i.e. Section 8 housing
- ☆ Million Mom March Foundation supports sensible gun laws and safe kids, children shouldn't go to school afraid

Media About the Hearing

This editorial was published May 18, 2001 in the four Enterprise newspapers covering the Upper Cape – Falmouth, Bourne, Mashpee, and Sandwich. Written by Janice Walford.

Advocates, victims, parents, grandparents, spoke with one voice last Wednesday: the female voice.

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, a new independent state agency, had come to the community college to hold a public hearing on the concerns of the women and girls who live and work on Cape Cod. Similar hearings are being held around the state.

As can easily be imagined, domestic violence, the shortage of affordable housing, and the quality and cost of child care topped the list of priorities going into the three-hour hearing. But as speaker after speaker took her place at the witness table, these priority concerns became entwined with those of economic and gender equality, health care, welfare reform, and flaws in the delivery of social services, particularly for children.

Three members of the 19-member commission heard the testimony, Roseanna Means of Wellesley, Marianne Fleckner of Westford, and Minosca Alcantara of Cambridge. They urged the speakers to be as specific as possible about the changes they wanted to see in state law and state policies.

The Massachusetts commission was established in 1998, one result of the 1995 United Nations conference on women, held in Beijing, which had urged national and local governments around the world to establish and financially support groups with a specific focus on women's issues. Five commissioners are appointed by the governor, four each by the house speaker and senate president, and six by the caucus of women legislators. There is no commissioner from Cape Cod, but one result of last Wednesday's hearing will be some heavy lobbying when there is a vacancy for a three-year term.

The commission's responsibilities include: studying, reviewing, and reporting on the status of women in Massachusetts; informing the leaders in the public and private sectors about issues pertaining to women; serving as clearing house for information; and identifying and recommending qualified women for appointive positions at all levels of government.

The Upper Cape was well represented Wednesday, including representatives from the Falmouth League of Women Voters, the Neighborhood Network Support Coalition, Circles for Change, DARE Family Services of Sandwich, Young Children First! of Falmouth, and the Safe Zone at Falmouth Hospital.

The three commission members were reminded in a various ways that while Cape Cod may share priority issues, such as domestic violence, with other parts of the commonwealth, there are problems specific to this region: higher than average rates of breast cancer, pollution of groundwater by the Massachusetts Military Reservation, the unknown health impacts from PAVE PAWS, the shortage of state education funds, and the lack of public transportation.

In addition, as lead speaker Leona Bombaci of Bourne, a state social worker since 1982, said in her overview of the challenges facing women and girls on Cape Cod, there's the off-Cape perception that this peninsula is a haven for rich retirees and vacationers.

No, said one witness, a disabled veteran, there are women losing their children because the only roof they can find is a motel room, which state law does not consider to be a home for child. She pleaded with the commissioners to help establish a system that preserves a family, rather than allowing children to be taken from a parent and sent off-Cape when there is no indication of abuse or neglect.

Lisa Switzer of DARE Family Services spoke movingly of the plight of girls in foster care who are "aged out" at 18 years old, unless they are in further education. "They are on their own at 18," Ms. Switzer said. "They are on the streets." The state provides very limited resources for these young women, she said. "There are homeless shelters for young men with problems and single mothers with children. But I challenge anyone of you to find a place for an 18-year-old girl who does not have a child or drug or alcohol problems.

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She said 2,700 young adults went into emergency shelters in 2000, a 37 percent increase over the previous year. "My concern is for the young ladies, who face homelessness, violence, no health care, no support, no one to fall back on."

Among the other problems cited was one by a family nurse practitioner for 20 years who said there is a "serious deficiency in obstetric care." The closing of the only practice on the Upper Cape for home births has "eradicated the choice for natural childbirth."

More than one speaker referred to "a real act of gender inequality": the fact men are covered under medical insurance for Viagra, while hormone replacement therapy and contraceptives are not covered for women. "If contraceptives were covered," one woman said, "there would be many fewer unintended pregnancies." Helen Warren of the Falmouth LWV added: "Not all choice is about abortion."

Two pieces of legislation on Beacon Hill now (Senate bill 805 and House bill 2193) are intended to rectify the gender inequality of the Viagra coverage.

A Cotuit resident said women and men of color have grown accustomed to earning less than white men. "We can't accept that," she said. "We have to work on comparable pay for comparable work. Leaving the power in the hands of white men is a tragedy."

Later in the hearing, local artist Robin Paris said it is deplorable that women have to spend far more of their income on health care than men. "There are more women in the world. Why is this happening? There is no equity. It is a travesty if it is allowed to continue. Silence is acceptance."

The women gathered at the college were not silent. They spoke clearly, eloquently for women and children who can't speak for themselves.

They deserve support in order to have their voices heard on Beacon Hill, and not just from the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women.

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
Charles F. Hurley Building
19 Staniford St., 6th Floor
Boston, MA 02114
Phone 617-626-6520
Fax 617-626-6530
TTY: 711-617-626-6520
mcsw@state.ma.us
www.state.ma.us/women